

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>Abd Allah Ibn Saba Myth Exploded</u> > 4. Tracing The Fairytale: Explicit Athar Mentioning "The Black Container"

4. Tracing The Fairytale: Explicit Athar Mentioning "The Black Container"

There are Sunni reports which allege that Imam 'Ali, 'alaihi al-salam, called someone – or perhaps each of a set of people – "the black container". We have quoted one of such *riwayat* in the last chapter. We will here proceed to examine all the other existing Sunni *riwayat* on "the black container".

Ibn Asakir (d. 571 H) records:

أخبرنا أبو القاسم يحيى بن بطريق بن بشرى وأبو محمد عبد الكريم بن حمزة قالا أنا أبو الحسن بن مكي أنا أبو القاسم المؤمل بن أحمد بن محمد الشيباني نا يحيى بن محمد بن صاعد نا بندار نا محمد بن جعفر نا شعبة عن سلمة عن زيد بن وهب عن علي قال ما لي ومال هذا الحميت الأسود قال ونا يحيى بن محمد نا بندار نا محمد بن جعفر نا شعبة عن سلمة قال قال سمعت أبا الزعراء يحدث عن علي عليه السلام قال ما لي ومال هذا الحميت الأسود

Abu al-Qasim Yahya b. Batriq b. Bushra and Abu Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim b. Hamzah – Abu al-Hasan b. Makki – Abu al-Qasim al-Muammal b. Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Shaybani – Yahya b. Muhammad b. Sa'id – Bundar – Muhammad b. Ja'far – Shu'bah – Salamah – Zayd b. Wahb:

'Ali said, "What do I have to do with this black container?"

And Yahya b. Muhammad – Bundar – Muhammad b. Ja'far – Shu'bah – Salamah – Abu al-Za'ra:

'Ali, 'alaihi al-salam, said: "What do I have to do with this black container?" 1

These ones are even more redundant than the previous one. No information whatsoever is given on the "black container". Who was he? What did he do? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! If we connected them with the other report, then we would have the identity of the "black container" as simply *Ibn al–Sawda* and his crime as telling lies upon Allah and His Messenger, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*. But, who was that even?!

The final Sunni *riwayah* on the "black container" is this one, reported by Imam Ibn Abi Khaythamah (d. 279 H):

حدثنا عمرو بن مرزوق قال أنا شعبة عن سلمة بن كهيل عن زيد بن وهب قال قال علي] ما لي [ولهذا الحميت الأسود يعنى عبد الله بن سبأ وكان يقع في أبي بكر وعمر

كذا قال: عن سلمة عن زيد بن وهب

'Amr b. Marzuq – Shu'bah – Salamah b. Kuhayl – Zayd b. Wahb:

'Ali said, "[What do I have to do] with this black container?". He meant 'Abd Allah b. Saba and he used to attack Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

That was how he said: from Salamah from Zayd b. Wahb.2

Imam Ibn Asakir also reports:

أخبرنا أبو محمد بن طاوس وأبو يعلى حمزة بن الحسن بن المفرج قالا أنا أبو القاسم بن أبي العلاء أنا أبو محمد بن أبي نصر أنا خيثمة بن سليمان نا أحمد بن زهير بن حرب نا عمرو بن مرزوق أنا شعبة عن سلمة بن كهيل عن زيد قال قال علي بن أبي طالب ما لي ولهذا الحميت الأسود يعني عبد الله بن سبأ وكان يقع في أبي بكر وعمر

Abu Muhammad b. Tawus and Abu Ya'la Hamzah b. al-Hasan b. al-Mufarraj – Abu al-Qasim b. Abi al-'Ala – Abu Muhammad b. Abi Nasr – Khaythamah b. Sulayman – Ahmad b. Zuhayr b. Harb – '**Amr b**. **Marzuq** – Shu'bah – Salamah b. Kuhayl – Zayd:

'Ali b. Abi Talib said, "What do I have to do with this black container?". He meant 'Abd Allah b. Saba and he used to attack Abu Bakr and 'Umar.3

This report has some serious problems. First and foremost, it is *mudraj* (interpolated). The sentence "He meant 'Abd Allah b. Saba and he used to attack Abu Bakr and 'Umar" was inserted by a narrator, and we have no explicit proof of who it was. It could have been any of the narrators from Amr b. Marzuq to Zayd b. Wahb. With no solid evidence to pinpoint a particular narrator as the source of the interpolation, it is impossible to rely upon it as an eye–witness testimony. So, that identification is *dha'if*.

Meanwhile, we have already seen the version of the *athar* transmitted by Muhammad b. Ja'far from Shu'bah from Salamah from Zayd. It does NOT contain the last phrase above, identifying the "black container" explicitly as 'Abd Allah b. Saba, and explaining his lies upon Allah and His Messenger as his attacks on Abu Bakr and 'Umar! Therefore, neither Shu'bah, nor Salamah, nor Zayd, was the source of that addition. Rather, the only possible origin of that interpolation was 'Amr b. Marzuq. This then rightly

leads to the conclusion that the *idraj* is NOT an eye-witness account. By contrast, it was made by someone who was disconnected from the reported incident by about one century! That confirms its invalidity.

Moreover, 'Amr b. Marzuq in the chain is dha'if. Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) says about him:

عمرو بن مرزوق الباهلي أبو عثمان البصري أثنى عليه سليمان بن حرب وأحمد بن حنبل وقال يحيى بن معين ثقة مأمون ووثقه ابن سعد وأما علي بن المديني فكان يقول اتركوا حديثه وقال القواريري كان يحيى بن سعيد لا يرضى عمرو بن مرزوق وقال الساجي كان أبو الوليد يتكلم فيه وقال ابن عمار والعجلي ليس بشئ وقال الدارقطني كثير الوهم

قلت :لم يخرج عنه البخاري في الصحيح سوى حديثين أحدهما حديثه عن شعبة عن عمرو بن مرة عن عروة عن أبي موسى في فضل عائشة وهو عنده بمتابعة آدم بن أبي إياس وغندر وغيرهما عن شعبة والثاني حديثه عن شعبة عن ابن أبي بكر عن أنس في ذلك الكبائر مقرونا عنده بعبد الصمد عن شعبة فوضح أنه لم يخرج له احتجاجا والله أعلم

'Amr b. Marzuq al-Bahili, Abu 'Uthman al-Basri: Sulayman b. Harb and Ahmad b. Hanbal extolled him; and Yahya b. Ma'in said, "*Thiqah* (trustworthy), reliable" and Ibn Sa'd declared him *thiqah* (trustworthy). **As for 'Ali b. al-Madini, he used to say, "Reject his** *ahadith***"! Al-Qawariri also said, "Yahya b. Sa'id was not pleased with 'Amr b. Marzuq". Al-Saji said, "Abu al-Walid used to criticize him". Both Ibn 'Ammar and al-'Ijli said, "He is nothing**". And al-Daraqutni said, "**He hallucinated A LOT**".

I say: al-Bukhari has not narrated from him in his *Sahih* except two *hadiths* only. One of them is his *hadith* from Shu'bah, from 'Amr b. Marrah, from 'Urwah, from Abu Musa concerning the merit of 'Aishah, and with him, it is with him through the *mutaba'at* of Adam b. Abi Iyas, Ghandar and others from Shu'bah. In his second *hadith* from Shu'bah from Ibn Abi Bakr from Anas concerning that *al-Kabair*, he is conjoined (in the chain) with 'Abd al-Samad from Shu'bah, with him (i.e. al-Bukhari). **So, it becomes clear that he did NOT narrate from him as a** *hujjah* **(proof**), and Allah knows best.4

If a narrator is *thiqah* (trustworthy), but hallucinates *a lot*, then his uncorroborated reports are *dha'if*. No wonder, al–Bukhari (d. 256 H) did not accept 'Amr b. Marzuq as a *hujjah*, and only conjoined him with others from Shu'bah in the chains. Therefore, the above chain of 'Amr b. Marzuq – in which he has stood alone without support – is *dha'if*.

However, some of our Sunni brothers attempt to defend 'Amr by quoting these further submissions of al-Hafiz:

قال أبو زرعة سمعت أحمد بن حنبل وقلت له ان علي بن المديني يتكلم في عمرو ابن مرزوق فقال عمرو رجل صالح لا أدري ما يقول علي ... قال أبو زرعة وسمعت سليمان ابن حرب وذكر عمرو بن مرزوق فقال جاء بما ليس

عندهم فحسدوه وقال الفضل بن زياد سأل عنه أبو عبيد الله الحداني عن أحمد بن حنبل فقال ثقة مأمون فتشنا على ما قيل فيه فلم نجد له أصلا

Abu Zur'ah said: I heard Ahmad b. Hanbal and I said to him that 'Ali b. al-Madini criticized 'Amr b. Marzuq. He said, "'Amr is a righteous man. I do not know what 'Ali says" ... Abu Zur'ah said: I also heard Sulayman b. Harb and he mentioned 'Amr b. Marzuq and said, "He came with what they did not have. So, they envied him." Al-Fadhl b. Ziyad said: Abu 'Ubayd Allah al-Hadani asked about him from Ahmad b. Hanbal and he said, "Trustworthy, reliable. We investigated what whas said about him, and we did not find any basis for it."5

Then, our opponents claim through these that all the criticisms against 'Amr were due to envy! However, this line of argument does not offer much help to our Sunni brothers. Sulayman b. Harb (d. 224 H) and Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 H) were obviously referring to the contemporaries of 'Amr in their objections. It is possible that *some* of those people were indeed influenced by envy in their castigation of him. It is equally possible that Sulayman and Ahmad were heavily biased in favour of him, or were both unable to conduct sufficient probes to determine the truth about him. In any case, what we primarily rely upon against him is from Imam al–Daraqutni (d. 385 H) and Imam al–Hakim (d. 403 H), later scholars who apparently had investigated his reports and had then drawn their conclusions. Obviously, the charge of envy does not affect the duo. Al–Hafiz submits about 'Amr:

وقال ابن عمار الموصلي ليس بشئ وقال العجلي عمرو ابن مرزوق بصري ضعيف يحدث عن شعبة ليس بشئ وقال ابن عمار الموصلي ليس بشئ الحفظ وقال الحاكم عن الدارقطني صدوق كثير الوهم وقال الحاكم سيئ الحفظ

Ibn 'Ammar al-Mawsili said: "He is nothing." Al-'Ijli said, "'Amr b. Marzuq Basri is *dha'if*. He narrated from Shu'bah. He was nothing. Al-Hakim narrated that al-Daraqutni said: "Very truthful. He hallucinated A LOT." And al-Hakim said, "He had a defective memory."6

Certainly, the reports of a narrator like this are *dha'if*, without doubt! Most importantly, the criticisms against him are "explained". Therefore, they take precedence over any praise of him.

- 1. Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Habat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, Ibn Asakir al-Shafi'i, Tarikh Madinah Dimashq (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1415 H) [annotator: 'Ali Shiri], vol. 29, p. 7
- 2. Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Abi Khaythamah Zuhayr b. Harb, Tarikh Ibn Abi Khaythamah (al-Faruq al-Hadithiyyah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 1st edition, 1424 H), vol. 3, p. 177, # 4358
- 3. Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Habat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, Ibn Asakir al-Shafi'i, Tarikh Madinah Dimashq (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1415 H) [annotator: 'Ali Shiri], vol. 29, pp. 7-8
- 4. Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Hajar al-'Asqalani al-Shafi'i, Hadi al-Sari Muqaddimah Fath al-Bari (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi; 1st edition, 1408 H), pp. 431-432
- 5. Shihab al-Din Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, Tahdhib al-Tahdhib (Dar al-Fikr; 1st edition, 1404 H), vol. 8, p. 88, #
- 6. Ibid, vol. 8, p. 89, # 160

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/abd-allah-ibn-saba-myth-exploded-toyib-olawuyi/4-tracing-fairytale-explicit-athar-mentioning-black#comment-0